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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the results of a national study of 89 rehabilitation counselors that investigated the methods by which an individual could retain competitive employment after the onset of a significant vision loss. The purpose of the study was to identify and describe strategies that contribute to successful job retention and identify best rehabilitation practices in regard to job retention for the visually impaired. Rehabilitation counselors were interviewed who described 189 cases of which they had first-hand knowledge. The study found that as a result of retention efforts among the 189 cases reported, 88 percent of the workers with visual impairments were able to remain in their existing job setting, 2 percent were able to obtain a promotion, 25 percent experienced an increase in salary, and 67 percent had no change in salary. Data also indicate that strategies involving job site modifications were the most frequently used by counselors, particularly modifications related to access and safety issues such as changes in lighting, enlarged print, and low technology adaptations in general. Recommendations for interventions in job retention for individuals who are blind or visually impaired are made for five primary areas: technology, communication, networking, assessment, and timeliness of response to a request for intervention. (CR)

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Intervention Practices in the Retention of Competitive Employment Among Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired

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INTERVENTION PRACTICES IN THE RETENTION OF COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT AMONG INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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Introduction

According to Kirchner (1985), Nelson and Dimitrova (1993), and Roberts (1992), approximately 6 to 17 out of every 1,000 individuals have vision disabilities. Employment figures among these individuals who are of working age range from 17% to 35%. Among those employed, approximately half are considered competitively employed. Among those who are visually impaired and classified as competitively employed, many have remained so due to rehabilitation counselor efforts related to retention activities. Individuals who experience declining vision during mid-career are more likely to accept early retirement (Roessler, 1989). Overall, the employment outlook for individuals with vision disabilities is quite bleak.

In general, the need for competitive employment among all individuals with disabilities is defined by society. Because a person's identity is linked to his/her job, competitive employment is a desirable outcome for all individuals. Additionally, competitive employment provides an excellent opportunity for integrating people with disabilities into society. According to McLoughlin, Garner, and Callahan (1987), the opportunity to earn a living leads to independence, the ability to exercise personal choice, and an array of nonmonetary benefits (p. 15).

"...the opportunity to earn a living leads to independence, the ability to exercise personal choice, and an array of nonmonetary benefits."

Other beneficial outcomes of competitive employment noted in the literature include its effect on the consumer's self-esteem, positive perceptions of family members/employers/society about people with disabilities, cost-effectiveness, and opportunities for advancement (Wehman, 1981). Simply stated, engaging in competitive employment is associated with many of the factors in our society found to be closely linked with one's overall quality of life.

"...competitive employment is associated with many of the factors in our society found to be closely linked with one's overall quality of life."

The ideal of competitive employment for *all* individuals has brought about federal legislation, the most recent being the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which was passed in 1990. This law specifically addresses the integration of people with disabilities in *all* domains of society, including employment. According to

"...if an individual in our current society who desires employment is considered unemployable, it is primarily because key players have failed to design and implement appropriate training strategies."

McLoughlin et al. (1987), if an individual in our current society who desires employment is considered unemployable, it is primarily because key players have failed to design and implement appropriate training strategies. Thus, it is important to identify factors that facilitate (or hinder) successful employment and job retention among individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Although many of these factors may seem fairly obvious, their effects vary in concert with economic, political, and personal conditions. These factors are summarized in the sections that follow.

Factors that Influence Employment Outcomes

Client Characteristics

In an effort to determine the primary factors associated with competitive employment, several researchers have focused primarily on client characteristics. These characteristics have included age, type and level of education, type of vision loss, age at which vision loss occurred, gender, race, and family size (Giesen et al., 1985; Greenwood & Johnson, 1985; Herndon, 1995). Herndon summarized the profile of clients who retained competitive employment. These individuals were more likely to (a) be male, White, 35 years of age or younger, educated; (b) have less than two dependents, thus four or less members in their family; (c) have attended specialized institutions for training; and (d) have received vocational or business school training.

Roessler (1989) proposed that the consumer's motivation to return to work is a crucial characteristic that affects retention of competitive employment. Utilizing a multi-factor approach, Roessler suggested that a person's motivation level is determined by several factors: (a) individual's knowledge of the behaviors and skills that are required to reach a goal; (b) his/her personal feelings of self-efficacy (which can be lowered by presence of a disability); (c) characteristics of the economy (e.g., instability, availability of jobs); (d) norms within the community; (e) feelings in response to being unemployed as a result of disability; (f) the value a person places on a work-related identity; and (g) financial disincentives for returning to work. Additional factors unique to the individual may also come into play.

Employer Attitudes and Perceptions

A number of employer attitudes in regard to hiring people with disabilities are largely consistent and even predictable across disability groups. In a survey conducted by Greenwood, Johnson, and Schriner (1988), the highest percentage of employers were concerned about the cost of job modifications and making employment settings accessible. Additional concerns employers mentioned include productivity (Condon, 1987; Greenwood & Johnson, 1985); an expectation that people with disabilities may lack the ability to adapt to change (Greenwood & Johnson); a fear of increased accident rates (Fuqua, Rathbun, & Gade, 1984); the ability of a person who is disabled to get along with others; a general fear of turnover, increased absenteeism, and increased insurance rates; and competence to perform at a professional/managerial level (Fuqua et al.; Greenwood & Johnson; Johnson, Greenwood, & Schriner, 1988; Schriner, Greenwood, & Johnson, 1989).

"...employers were concerned about the cost of job modifications and making employment settings accessible."

In a study conducted by Michaels and Risucci (1993), employers expressed concerns regarding the feasibility of some procedural accommodations necessary when working with individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (e.g., breaking down instructions, part-time schedules, providing one-to-one instruction, placing a person in a minimal noise area, outlining routines, spreading work out over a period of time, and restructuring job duties). Although these concerns are specific to the population with TBI, among them are some general applications for other populations of individuals with disabilities.

It is worth noting that some studies have found among employees a lower resistance toward hiring people with disabilities. For example, Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, and Levy (1993) surveyed executives in Fortune 500 corporations and found that these employers' average rating for the "Appropriateness of Competitive Employment" was highest for people with severe disabilities, 5.25 on a scale ranging from 1 to 6 (6 representing a very positive rating). In addition, Levy et al. found that organizations held a more positive attitude if they had hired persons with severe disabilities in the preceding 3 years or when they had previous experience working with individuals with disabilities.

"...organizations held a more positive attitude if they had hired persons with severe disabilities in the preceding 3 years or when they had previous experience working with individuals with disabilities."

A careful examination of these concerns suggests that

increased education/awareness concerning individuals with disabilities and rehabilitation support systems (e.g., on-the-job training) are often viable approaches toward helping employers overcome obstacles in the employment and retention of people with disabilities (Fabian, Edelman, & Leedy, 1993). Greenwood et al. (1988) asked employers to rate incentives that would encourage them to employ workers with disabilities. More than 50% of the employers selected the following factors (in order of importance): (a) an available supply of employees trained and prepared for work, (b) an ability to retain employees who become disabled while working in the organization, (c) availability of on-the-job training funds to help pay the salaries of newly employed persons who have a disability, (d) availability of tax credits, and (e) feelings of self-satisfaction realized from having employed workers with disabilities.

In addition to employer attitudes and perceptions, DiLeo and Langton (1993) noted that counselors should be keenly aware of employer management and learning styles. These various styles relate to an employer's preferences in regard to (a) pace of operation, (b) short-term versus long-term perspectives, (c) level of need for affirmation, and (d) primary sensory modalities.

"...counselors should be keenly aware of employer management and learning styles."

Characteristics of the Workplace

DiLeo and Langton (1993) and Fabian et al. (1993) suggested that additional factors that influence the successful employment of people with disabilities relate to natural supports in the workplace (e.g., coworkers and availability of resources). The authors found that variables related to the job setting in combination with personality characteristics (e.g., assertiveness) have an impact on removing obstacles to successful employment of people with disabilities. DiLeo and Langton encouraged job developers to determine what a business already provides in terms of orientation, training, and employee support before committing to become a sole source of support.

"...additional factors that influence the successful employment of people with disabilities related to natural supports in the workplace....variables related to the job setting in combination with personality characteristics."

Case studies reported by Fabian et al. (1993) seemed to suggest that the most efficacious role of an outside intervenor (employment consultant) would be to identify problems and suggest strategies which can be implemented at the discretion of the employer and the employee. DiLeo and Langton (1993) noted that it is important that counselors be careful to position themselves more as consultants rather than caretakers for the employee. Important elements in determining job success for people with disabilities within the immediate workplace environment include the availability of resources, the resources contributed by the worker with a disability, the attitudes of coworkers, and the general work environment.

Rehabilitation Approaches

Over the last decade, the increased emphasis on business-rehabilitation partnerships has placed unexpected demands on rehabilitation agencies. Businesses rely on rehabilitation agencies for services in areas such as (a) training for employees regarding disability issues (56%), (b) accessibility modification (43%), (c) job modification and restructuring (33%), and (d) implementation of affirmative action programs (30%) (Greenwood, Schriner, & Johnson, 1991). Employers stated that they found the following services/resources useful:

1. Assistance with employees who become disabled while employed (88%),
2. referrals of persons with disabilities who are job ready (83%),
3. consultation regarding job modifications (76%),
4. rehabilitation employment specialists who have first-hand knowledge of employer's operations (75%),
5. disability awareness training for employees (70%),
6. rehabilitation employment specialists who are knowledgeable about accessibility at the work site (69%),
7. acquiring special tax incentives and wage subsidies (67%),
8. rehabilitation employment specialists who are professionals and who dress and act properly (65%), and
9. advice on architectural barrier removal (60%).

Roessler (1987) highlighted the danger of isolating counselors from employers, unions, employment agencies, and other social, health, and educational organizations. In the face of such isolation, rehabilitation agencies may be unable to help consumers avail themselves of the opportunity to be competitively employed or to retain employment (Greenwood et al., 1988).

"...Stable and on-going partnerships between businesses and rehabilitation agencies will facilitate a more seamless provision of services that will benefit both employers and employees."

Stable and on-going partnerships between businesses and rehabilitation agencies will facilitate a more seamless provision of services that will benefit both employers and employees. The expressed needs of employers suggest that the stance of rehabilitation agencies should be proactive rather than reactive.

Rehabilitation Counselor Factors

The employer expectations previously outlined suggest some important roles for the rehabilitation counselor. It is imperative that the counselor be aware of resources, employer expectations, consumer expectations, the economic climate, and the availability of specialized service providers. In addition, the counselor should be aware of strategies that increase the likelihood of competitive employment and continuation of employment among persons with disabilities.

Michaels and Risucci (1993) surveyed employers and rehabilitation counselors regarding areas of concern related to job accommodations for people with TBI. Overall, employer attitudes toward accommodations were more positive than attitudes of rehabilitation counselors. These authors suggested that rehabilitation counselors may tend to underestimate employer attitudes. In this study, counselors were *5 times* (25.9%) more likely than employers (5.7%) to consider conditions related to the consumer's disability as posing the greatest obstacle to accommodation. Furthermore, employers were twice as likely to take into consideration job performance in job accommodation than did counselors. These findings are disturbing, but may provide counselors with important insight regarding differences in tendencies among employers and rehabilitation professionals (Mithaug, 1980).

"...rehabilitation counselors may tend to underestimate employer attitudes."

Other important aspects of the rehabilitation counselor's role include providing consumers with skills training related to job performance, job-seeking, job obtainment, and job retention. In addition, it is important for counselors to stay abreast of trends in the job market such as the "electronic cottage" (industries centered on the use of microcomputers and telephone linkages out of one's home). Roessler (1987) also suggested that the counselor establish "connections" with

organizations that maintain critical input into the lives of consumers. These include but are not limited to (a) school/educational agencies, (b) labor unions, (c) social and health organizations, (d) employment agencies, and (e) employers.

In concert with all of these factors, the rehabilitation counselor should work closely with the consumer to determine his/her motivation to return to work, as well as his/her level of self-efficacy, perceptions regarding employment, financial needs/concerns, etc.

"...the rehabilitation counselor should work closely with the consumer to determine his/her motivation to return to work, as well as his/her level of self-efficacy, perceptions regarding employment, financial needs/concerns, etc."

National Issues

As mentioned earlier, the passage of the ADA has had some impact on the employment of people with disabilities. Other national policies that have apparently had an impact on employers include tax incentives, minimization of disincentives to work, emphasis on vocational preparation and transition, and continuing governmental support of affirmative action and accessibility programs (Roessler, 1987). National economic factors that affect the employability of individuals with disabilities include supply and demand in the labor market and changes in the nature of jobs (e.g., the trend toward service-oriented and specialized knowledge-oriented jobs). Population demographics, community milieu, and attitudes toward persons with disabilities are also variables that must be considered.

The preceding collection of factors that often affect employment outcomes for people with disabilities is extensive, but not exhaustive. Most interventions aimed at helping individuals with disabilities re-enter or continue in the workforce incorporate only a limited number of factors. However, the fact that multiple (and often conflicting) factors influence a person's decision to continue working after the onset of a disability lends support for Chubon's (1992) systems-based rehabilitation intervention model. This model, which focuses on modifying the role of the rehabilitation

"...multiple (and often conflicting) factors influence a person's decision to continue working after the onset of a disability."

counselor, suggests that rehabilitation interventions are best determined using a problem-solving approach, in which the solution is congruent with the beliefs and expectations of the principal(s) involved. Thus, the role of a rehabilitation counselor in some situations may become that of a problem-solver rather than a mediator; this conclusion is also supported by DiLeo and Langton (1993) and Fabian et al. (1993). This shift in roles not only increases the likelihood for successful rehabilitation, but may simultaneously place the counselor at a lower risk for burnout.

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Strategies for Increasing Job Retention

Several strategies for increasing job retention have been suggested and documented in the literature. Some job-related problems that may require intervention are absenteeism, an inability to "fit in" the workplace, a change in supervision or the supervisory structure, architectural adaptation, personal problems associated with disability, a change in job requirements, and onset or progression of disability.

Greenwood et al. (1988) surveyed employers regarding their *preferences* for implementing procedures designed for returning disabled employees to work. The most popular options were as follows:

1. Keep the person on the same job if at all possible (52.5%),
2. provide release time for treatment or therapy (45.8%),
3. refer person to an outside organization for assistance (38.0%),
4. alter job responsibilities/job description (35%), and
5. reassign person to a comparable position (34.3%).

In practice, employers were not implementing Strategy 4 to help employees return to work. Strategies that were used included (a) allowing part-time employment (34%); (b) providing retraining assistance (31.5%); (c) modifying, within reason, the

job setting to promote accessibility (25.5%); (d) reducing work load (23.8%); and (e) training other staff in disability awareness (23.8%). There have been few studies that attempted to determine which strategies result in successful retention of competitive employment among people with disabilities.

In particular, there is a shortage of information regarding retention strategies for specific disability groups. Therefore, this research study was undertaken to investigate successful job retention strategies implemented by rehabilitation counselors working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

"...There have been few studies that attempted to determine which strategies resulted in successful retention of competitive employment among people with disabilities."

For the sake of discussion, strategies are classified into the following areas: (a) job site modification, (b) job restructuring, (c) retraining, and (d) involvement of organized labor.

Method

Purpose of Study

In 1990, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) published priorities for research and training in the area of rehabilitation for individuals with blindness and low vision. One of these priorities focused on competitive employment for individuals who are blind or experiencing low vision. This report is based on a study conducted by the Mississippi State University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (MSU-RRTC) during the second phase of a three-part project that investigated the methods by which an individual could retain competitive employment after the onset of a significant vision loss. The purpose of this phase of the research project is to (a) identify and describe strategies that contribute to successful job retention and (b) identify best rehabilitation practices in regard to job retention.

Recruitment of Respondents

In order to achieve these aims, successful rehabilitation counselors who worked on job retention with persons who are blind or visually impaired were identified and interviewed. Once approval was obtained from the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, state directors of designated public agencies serving persons who are blind were contacted to identify a pool of rehabilitation counselors who had demonstrated success in the area of job

retention. The number of rehabilitation counselors selected in each state was proportional to the number of individuals with blindness served in each state during the preceding recording period. According to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) database provided to the MSU-RRTC, a total of 33,657 clients were served in the U.S. during fiscal year 1989. A sample of 153 counselors was selected, an average of 1 per 220 clients. The same ratio was used to determine the number of counselors selected from each state, with the additional parameter of a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 10 counselors per state. Thus, larger states had a higher representation in the pool of participants.

Specific counselors were nominated by state agency directors and/or supervisors based upon their known success in the arena of job retention. Subsequently, letters soliciting counselor participation were mailed which explained the nature of the project and contained a list of questions that would be asked along with a pre-addressed postcard to register their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix A). The counselors who volunteered were also asked to indicate their preference for times and days when they could be contacted by phone. Eighty-nine rehabilitation counselors chose to participate in the interviews. In total, these counselors described 189 cases of which they had first-hand knowledge.

Description of Interview

The interview form (Appendix B) consisted of five open-ended questions and two closed-ended questions. Counselors were provided with a copy of the questions prior to the interview. They were asked to identify one to three job retention cases which they had successfully closed and encouraged to review these files before the scheduled interview time. Prior to conducting the interview with each counselor, the interviewer reviewed the definition of competitive employment, explained the purpose of the study, and reiterated that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and without obligation.

For the purpose of this study, competitive occupations were defined as those occupations which would be available to sighted as well as visually impaired individuals. This definition excludes homemakers, Business Enterprise vendors, sheltered workshop employees, and other occupations of this general type. The interviews were conducted by three project staff members with the aid of an interview form. All questions were asked in a uniform fashion, and the interviewers made every attempt to write out counselor responses verbatim. Interviewers periodically compared notes in order to maintain consistency in the recording of novel responses that arose.

The questions presented in the interview pertained to (a) changes in salary from referral to closure of the case, (b) nature of retention, (c) job site modifications, (d) job restructuring, (e) retraining, (f) involvement of organized labor, and (g) perceptions of best practices for increasing the likelihood of job retention. Responses to the last question regarding best practices were subjected

to a content analysis, and each category was converted into a strategy for rehabilitation counselors to implement in order to increase job retention.

Outcomes Defined

Answers to questions about the types of intervention, salary outcome, and types of retention were carefully examined, and the following categories were developed.

Type of Retention

1. Full Retention (consumer continued the same job in the same setting at the end of the intervention).
2. Retention based on different job in same setting.
3. Retention based on different job in different setting.
4. Promotion.

Change in Salary

1. Higher.
2. Higher due to increase in hours worked per week.
3. Same.
4. Lower due to decrease in hours worked per week.
5. Lower.
6. Not sure.

Job Site Modification

1. Environmental--Access and Safety: Change in lighting, enlarged print, accessible filing systems, moving offices to accommodate lighting needs, large dials, and other low technology adaptations.
2. Environmental--Secondary: Change in layout to accommodate additions like computers, printers, scanners.
3. Computers and Other Hardware--Non-Access: Computers, typewriters, printers, scanners.
4. Access Software--Large Print.
5. Access Hardware--Large Print: Close-Circuit Television.
6. Access Software--Speech and Braille.
7. Access Hardware--Speech and Braille: Braille printers, personal readers, Braille 'n Speak, Type 'n Speak, hardware for speech output (including sound cards and external speakers).
8. Other: Modifications such as glasses, large dial medical supplies, etc.

Job Restructuring

1. Human Assistance: Drivers and readers used for permanent and temporary assistance.
2. Change in Mode of Job Assignment: Tasks assigned in an accessible manner by using a marker, giving directions on tape, writing clearly, etc.
3. Change in Job Assignment: Basic changes in activities by trading duties with a coworker.
4. Reduced Hours that occurred during job training.
5. Shift Change/Flexible Deadlines: Working during evenings or flexible scheduling used to accommodate for transportation needs and visual needs, or flexible deadlines allowed by the employer.
6. Reduced Hours: A permanent decrease in the number of hours worked or a shift to part-time work allowed for a variety of purposes--medical, financial, etc.

Retraining

1. Training provided in the use of equipment.
2. Adjustment to Blindness: Orientation and mobility (O & M) training, counseling on disability issues, visual scanning techniques, and daily living skills training.
3. Job Training: Training in the activities integral to performing the job. This category does not include general O & M.
4. Formal Training (degree/diploma): Four-year colleges, computer courses, and technical/vocational schools.
5. Other: Braille training and miscellany.

Cooperation with Organized Labor

1. Labor Organizations as Active Advocates for the Consumer (rehabilitation counselor served as consultant).
2. Labor Organizations in a Supportive Role for the Counselor.
3. Other (presence of EEOC and similar organizations at negotiation meetings).

Categories for the answers to questions regarding best practices are reported as suggestions for counselors in the Results section of this monograph.

Limitations of this Study

Although the purpose of this project was to identify strategies utilized by rehabilitation counselors in successful job retention cases, the actual success of

these strategies is based on anecdotal reports. The results of this report should be interpreted in context and applied with care. Because the counselors who participated in this study were volunteers who were nominated by state directors and supervisory staff, reported strategies are not necessarily representative of all effective strategies used by rehabilitation counselors.

Reported strategies were based on recollection and reconstruction of past events and are subject to the biases and limitations of such a design. Additionally, the cases that were selected to form the basis of responses were considered by counselors to be exemplary in nature. It is likely that there is some selection bias regarding the cases that were discussed in the interviews (i.e., counselors may have selected cases in which technology was predominant because those cases appealed to them).

The categories reported in this publication were derived by the authors. It is possible that other researchers would have devised a different set of categories; therefore, the reader should look at these categories as less than rigid. In some cases, clients did not receive comprehensive interventions from the rehabilitation agency because their salary was above the maximum required to be eligible for the purchase of equipment. In such instances, the client/employer purchased the equipment with minimal consultation from the rehabilitation counselor. Although some of the limitations mentioned are exceptions to the sample as a whole, the description of strategies chosen for helping clients retain their jobs should be read with these limitations in mind.

Results

As mentioned earlier, counselor responses were examined and grouped into categories. Responses relating to current practices were sorted into descriptive categories to determine the frequency of strategies used within each category. General information about the cases recounted by the counselors regarding the nature of retention and change in salary are reported in Tables 1 and 2.

Among the 189 cases reported, 2% obtained a promotion as a result of job retention efforts (Table 1, Figure 1). Three out of 4 individuals (76%) maintained full retention of their existing job without an alteration in job setting. Another 12% remained in the same job setting, but actually changed jobs. Excluding those promoted, 10% of these retention efforts resulted in a change in both job duties and setting. To summarize, as a result of retention efforts, only 24% of all individuals in this study actually changed jobs, while at least 88% were able to remain in their existing job setting.

Table 1: Nature of Retention (n=189)

Type	Frequency (%)
Complete Retention	144 (76)
Different Job, Same Setting	22 (12)
Different Job, Different Setting	19 (10)
Promotion	4 (2)

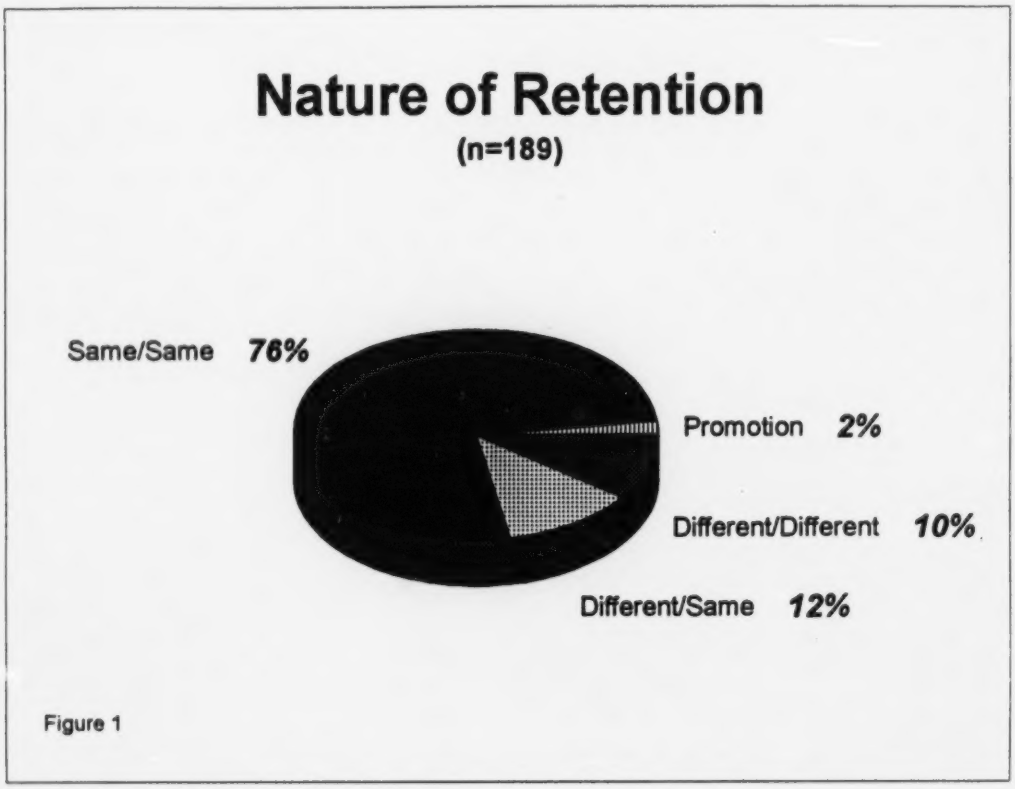

Figure 1

An inquiry into changes in salary related to retention efforts revealed that 1 out of 4 (25%) of these participants experienced an increase in salary (Table 2, Figure 2). These salary increases were not related to an increase in work time. Two out of 3 individuals (67%) had no change in salary and 5% actually reported a decrease in salary. Based strictly upon changes in salary among this group, retention efforts "paid off" monetarily for at least one fourth of these workers.

Table 2: Change in Salary (n=189)

Type	Frequency (%)
No Change	126 (67)
Higher	48 (25)
Higher Salary, Due to Increase in Hours	5 (3)
Lower	1 (1)
Lower Salary, Due to Decrease in Hours	7 (4)
Unsure	2 (1)

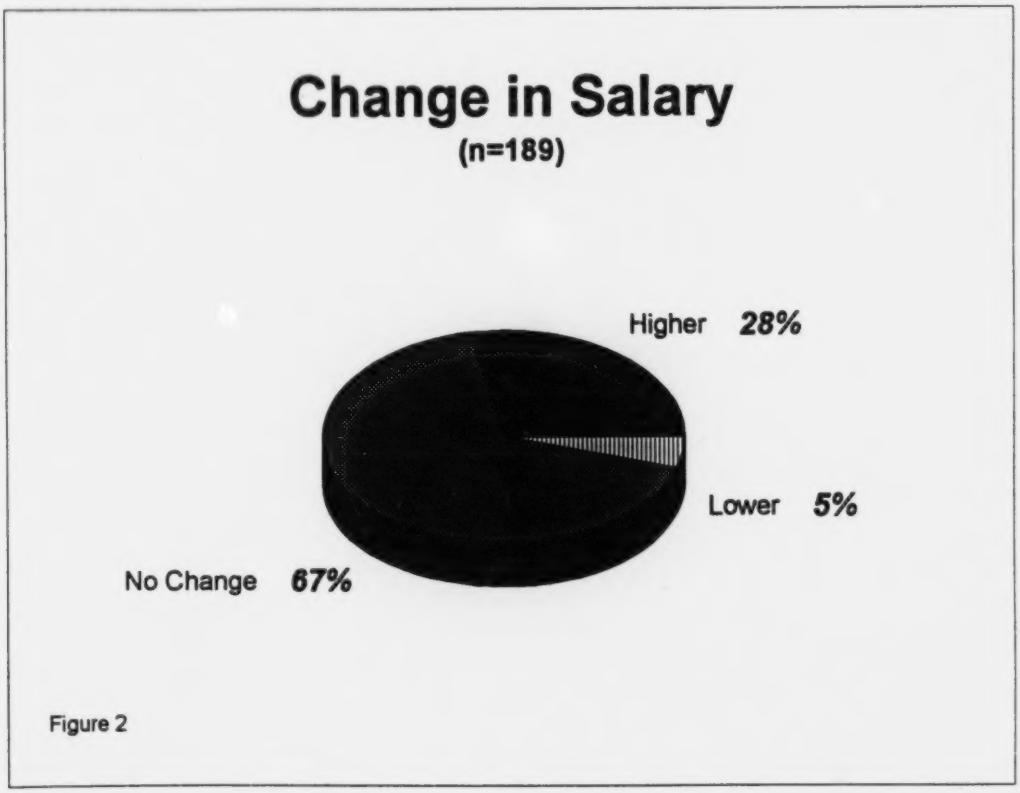

Figure 2

One-hundred-eighty-seven cases (n=187) reported some information related to changes in salary. Two out of 3, 67% of this sample, reported no change in salary. All of those who were promoted registered an increase in salary (Table 3, Figure 3). Among the 53 cases (28% of the total sample) that reported an increase in salary, 22 or 41% were reported among those who had actually changed jobs (without promotion) as a part of the process of retention. Interestingly, more than half (51%) of the salary increases were registered among those who retained the same job within the same setting.

Table 3: Number of People who Experienced a Change in Salary by Categories of Retention (n=189)

	Type of Retention			
Salary Change	Promotion	Full Retention Same Setting	Different Job Same Setting	Different Job Different Setting
Higher	4	27	11	11
Lower	0	6	2	1
No Change	0	111	6	9

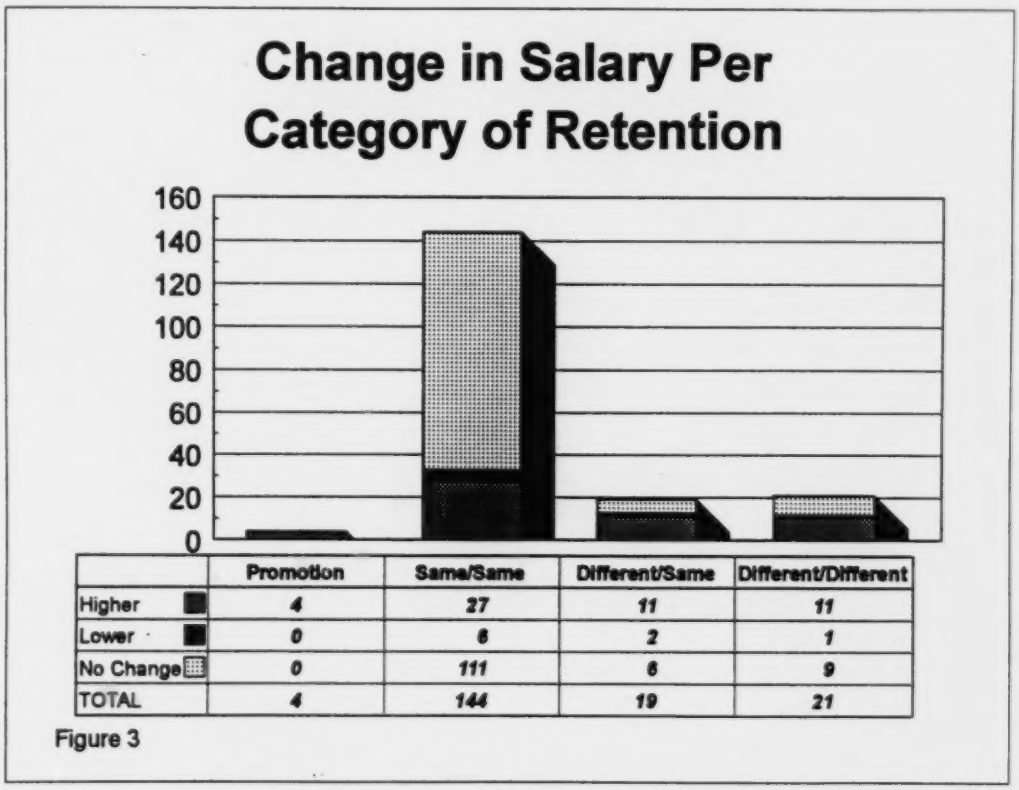

Figure 3

Counselors participating in this study also responded to four open-ended questions about job site modifications, job restructuring, retraining, and cooperation with organized labor. A summary of strategies within each of these areas is presented in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7. A description of each category (with examples) is found in the Method section of this report.

Overall, strategies involving job site modifications were the most frequently used by counselors. In the majority of cases, multiple strategies (two to three) were utilized (Table 4, Figure 4), thus the sum total of frequencies is greater than 100%.

In the majority of instances (48%), job site modifications related to access and safety issues such as changes in lighting, enlarged print, and low technology adaptations in general. Hardware for promoting access to enlarged print via closed-circuit television was utilized among 43% of the cases. Computers, scanners, printers, and other hardware not specifically related to low vision access issues were required among 37% of retention cases. Thirty-six percent of these individuals required "other" modifications such as glasses, light protection, or devices for monitoring medical conditions. Roughly 1 in 4 participants required modifications related to software for accessing speech, Braille, and large print; Braille printers; speech output hardware; personal readers; and job site configuration and accommodation for special equipment. Overall, the specific strategies listed reflect the contemporary movement toward computerization in the workplace and the availability of access technology for individuals who are blind.

Table 4: Frequency of Strategies Reported in the Area of Job Site Modification (n=189)

Strategy	Frequency (%)
Environmental Changes (Access and Safety)	91 (48)
Environmental Changes (Secondary)	37 (20)
Computers and Other Hardware	69 (37)
Access Software (Large Print)	53 (28)
Access Hardware (Large Print)	81 (43)
Access Software (Speech/Braille)	46 (24)
Access Hardware (Speech/Braille)	46 (24)
Other (Primarily Medical Technology)	68 (36)

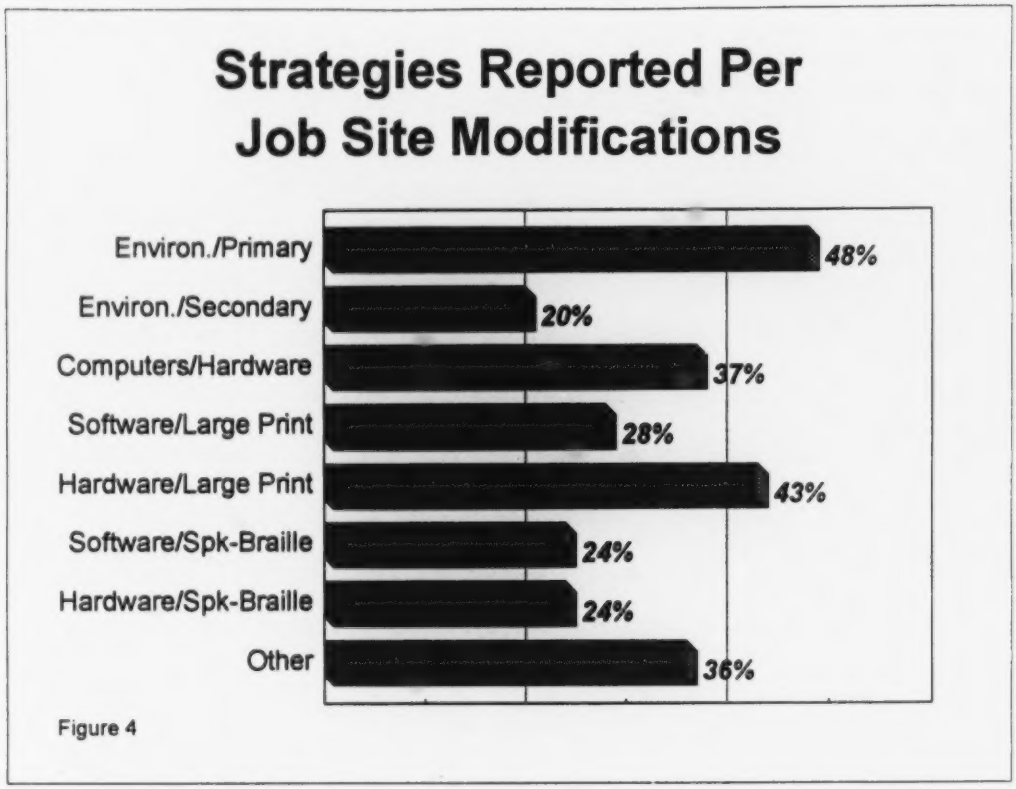

Figure 4

Among the 189 cases, counselors reported 107 (57%) in which specific job restructuring strategies were utilized (Table 5, Figure 5). The most frequently used strategy was Human Assistance (16%). This intervention strategy included permanent or temporary assignment of human assistance for driving and reading. Other restructuring strategies included Change in Duties (16%), Change in Mode of Job Assignment (10%), and Shift Change/Flexible Deadlines (9%).

Table 5: Frequency of Strategies Reported in the Area of Job Restructuring (n=189)

Strategy	Frequency (%)
Human Assistance	31 (16)
Change in Duties	30 (16)
Change in Mode of Job Assignment	19 (10)
Shift Change/Flexible Deadlines	17 (9)
Reduced Hours During Job Training	7 (4)
Reduced Hours	3 (2)

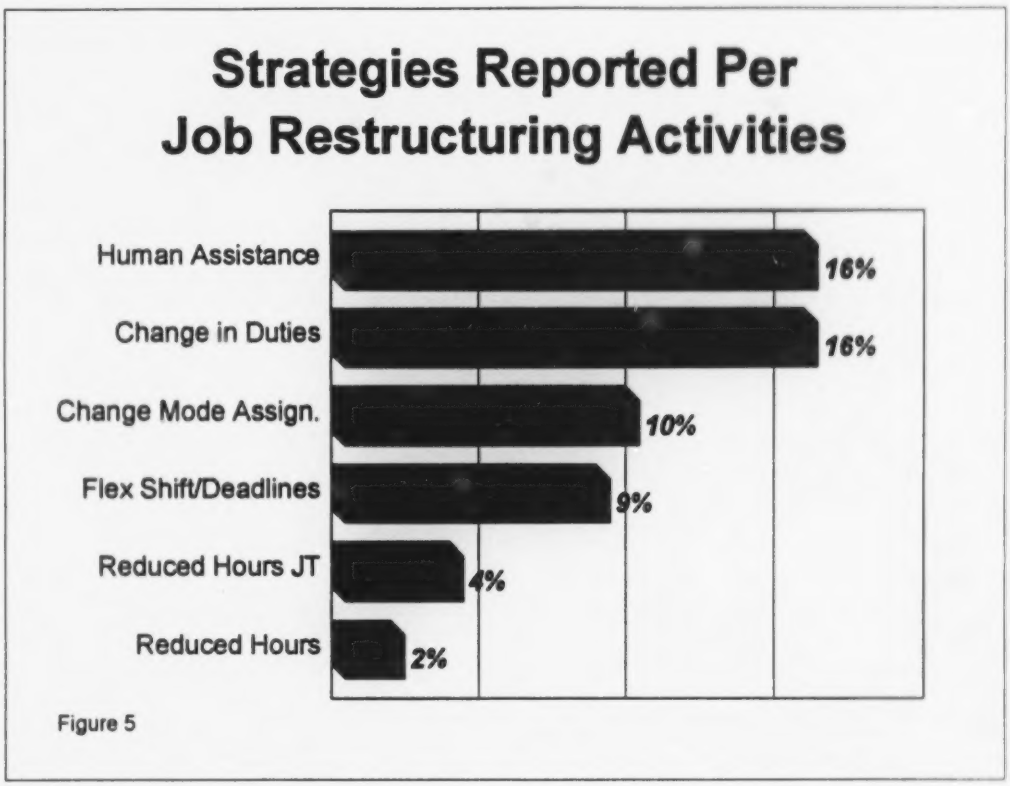

Figure 5

The Shift Change/Flexible Deadlines category primarily represented an exchange of duties between coworkers, where a sighted coworker took over the activities that relied primarily on sight. In exchange, the consumer accepted responsibility for activities that did not rely primarily on vision. The least frequently used strategies were Reduced Hours During Job Training (3.7%) and Reduced Hours (1.6%).

The second most frequently used intervention was retraining. Rehabilitation counselors reported providing training primarily in areas of Equipment Use (57.7%) and Adjustment to Blindness (46%). Additional areas of retraining are listed in Table 6 and depicted in Figure 6.

Table 6: Frequency of Strategies Reported in the Area of Retraining (n=189)

Strategy	Frequency (%)
Training in the Use of Equipment	109 (58)
Adjustment to Blindness	87 (46)
Job Training	23 (12)
Formal Training	16 (9)
Other	7 (4)

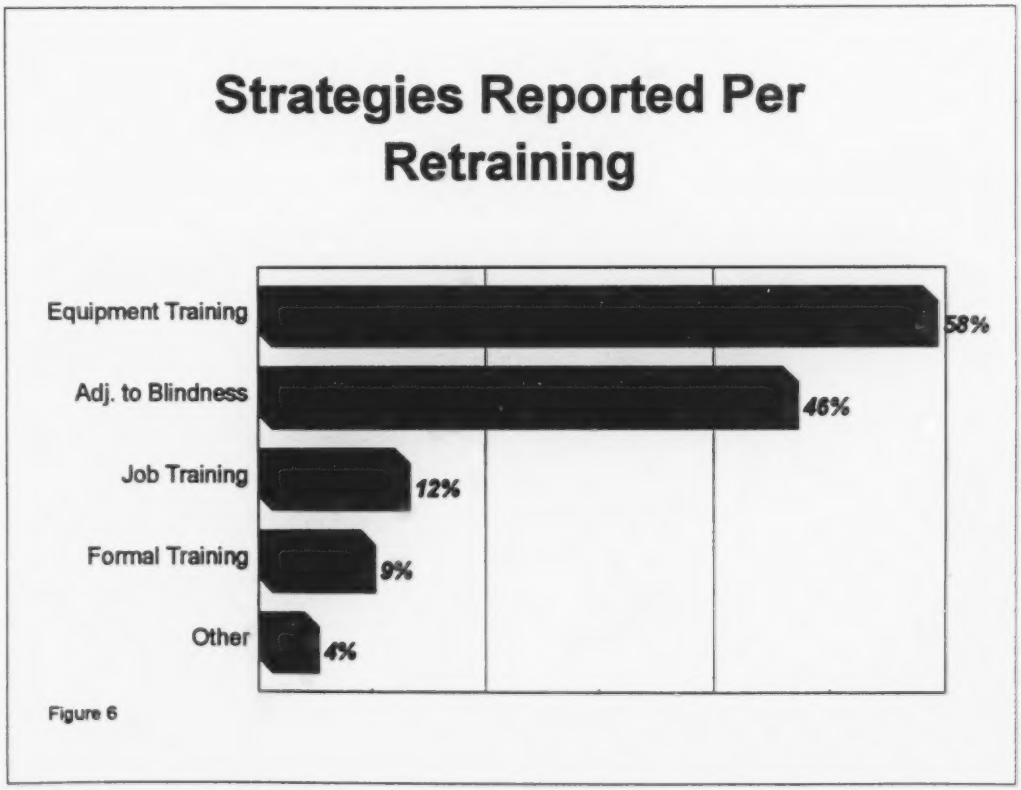

Figure 6

Very few rehabilitation counselors reported having interactions with organized labor representatives in the rehabilitation process (Table 7). The most frequent strategy in this area was Organized Labor Providing Assistance to the Rehabilitation Counselor (6.3% of the cases).

Table 7: Frequency of Strategies Reported in Cooperation with Organized Labor (n=189)

Strategy	Frequency (%)
Organized Labor As:	
Active Advocates for the Consumer	2 (1)
Providing Assistance to the Rehabilitation Counselor	12 (6)
Other (EEOC)	2 (1)

The last question in the telephone interview was "Do you have any additional information to offer which might be of assistance in identifying practices which are effective in enhancing job retention?" This question was asked with the intention of identifying best practices in the area of job retention. Strategies developed on the basis of responses to these questions have been categorized and are reported in Table 8.

Table 8: Best Practices in Job Retention

Communication	Frequency
INCREASE AWARENESS AMONG EMPLOYEES Increase awareness about blindness, rehabilitation process, and about disabilities in general. This was the most frequently stated strategy in the category of Communication.	33
ESTABLISH RAPPORT WITH EMPLOYER Recognize the importance of the cooperation of employers/supervisors in successful job retention. Ensure them that you will be available if they have questions/concerns.	26
FACILITATE OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ALL INDIVIDUALS With the permission of the client, inform the employer about the vision loss. Visit the job site, explain your role and the rehabilitation process, and facilitate communication between all individuals.	23
ASSESS THE EMPLOYER'S COMMITMENT TO RETAINING THE PERSON WHO IS BLIND If the employer has concerns about the ability of the person to perform well at the job, or has any other doubts, address these issues before planning a formal assessment.	13
WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH EMPLOYERS AND CONSUMERS AND CONVEY REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS Work with employers and consumers as partners in the rehabilitation process. Be clear in explaining the interventions and outline roles of all concerned parties.	12
MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT THE REHABILITATION PROCESS During the intervention process, continue to communicate with employers and other team members.	2

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION	Frequency
ASSESS THE CONSUMER'S VOCATIONAL SKILLS, MOTIVATION, AND LEVEL OF VISION Determine the consumer's reasons for being in that job; conduct a vocational evaluation (including past jobs held by him/her); determine level of functional vision, mobility skills, and level of self-advocacy. Also, keep in mind general skills that contribute to success in the workplace.	47
EVALUATE THE JOB SITE Conduct site visits to assess the nature of work, interactions between coworkers, and the general "lay-out" of the workplace.	12
CONDUCT A JOB ANALYSIS Obtain a copy of the job description and analyze the job into various components. Conduct a task analysis for each component.	10
DETERMINE IF A GOOD "MATCH" EXISTS BETWEEN THE JOB AND CONSUMER'S ABILITIES A good match between the job and worker abilities has a positive relationship with success in retaining the job.	3
AGENCY POLICIES	**Frequency**
FACILITATE NETWORKS BETWEEN REHABILITATION AGENCY AND COMMUNITY Conduct education programs for the general public, employers, and health professionals to facilitate early referral for services. A strategy for developing such networks is to select an "Employer of the Year" by rehabilitation districts.	15
MONITOR YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARD JOB RETENTION AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED A belief in job retention and employment of individuals who are blind or visually impaired is positively related to successful retention of employment.	7

EXAMINE AGENCY POLICIES FOR THE FLEXIBILITY ALLOWED Since individuals in some occupations may have to maintain an image (e.g., lawyers), some of their computer equipment may need to be selected on the basis of visual appeal. Some flexibility in implementing agency policies would be helpful.	2
INTERVENTION PROCESS	**Frequency**
WHEN CONDUCTING EVALUATIONS OR RECOMMENDING INTERVENTIONS, USE AVAILABLE EXPERT HELP Due to the specialized nature of some services, the rehabilitation counselor may have to rely on experts in the field like technology specialists, rehabilitation engineers, rehabilitation teachers, job developers, job coaches, low vision specialists, etc.	25
RESPOND TO REQUESTS FOR INTERVENTION IN A TIMELY MANNER A timely response to requests for services, early identification of services, and intervention enhances the likelihood of successful job retention. The needs of some individuals with low vision may not be addressed due to the "order of selection" criteria, though these individuals are very likely to benefit from early intervention.	17
IN *RETRAINING* FOR RETENTION OF EMPLOYMENT, INCLUDE INSTRUCTION IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND PERSONAL COUNSELING Retraining in the use of adaptive and other equipment is an essential part of the rehabilitation process. In addition, it may be necessary to help the consumer cope with personal issues related or unrelated to vision disabilities. Success at the workplace is often determined by these personal factors.	11
PAY ATTENTION TO TECHNOLOGY AND ERGONOMICS IN *JOB SITE MODIFICATION* Match all equipment within the context of the job site and consumer needs. Try simple solutions before complicated (and expensive) solutions.	8

MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH THE EMPLOYER AND CONSUMER AND CONDUCT ROUTINE FOLLOW-UPS After implementing intervention, routinely follow-up with the consumer and the employer to determine effectiveness of interventions. This will help circumvent any future problems.	7
PROVIDE TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS FOR COWORKERS AND OTHER STAFF AT THE JOB SITE Conduct sensitivity training for coworkers of persons with vision disabilities to ease the transition period of returning to work and to facilitate job performance.	4
THE JOB MAY NEED TO BE TEMPORARILY *RESTRICTED* DURING THE REHABILITATION PROCESS During rehabilitation, the consumer may have to take time off from work, requiring the job to be temporarily restricted.	1

Discussion

Access technology permeates the majority of job site modifications for people with blindness who are seeking to retain competitive employment. Job restructuring, an area which is of concern to employers, is an infrequently used domain of intervention. In the majority of successful retention cases, restructuring involved providing human assistance, changing job assignments in exchange for other duties, and changing the mode of job assignments for better access to information. Retraining strategies focused primarily on the use of equipment and issues relating to adjustment to disability. In the latter category, orientation and mobility was a frequent intervention. Among the cases discussed by the rehabilitation counselors, interactions with organized labor were not commonly reported. The most common role played by organized labor was providing assistance to counselors regarding policy and advocacy. Most rehabilitation counselors indicated they had little or no previous training/experience working with unions.

"Retraining strategies focused primarily on the use of equipment and issues relating to adjustment to disability."

Based on the responses of 89 counselors across the U.S., there emerge some

"...trends among recommendations for intervention in job retention...pertain to five primary areas: (a) technology, (b) communication, (c) networking, (d) assessment, and (e) timeliness of response to a request for intervention."

trends among recommendations for intervention in job retention for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. These recommendations pertain to five primary areas: (a) technology, (b) communication, (c) networking, (d) assessment, and (e) timeliness of response to a request for intervention.

Communication

It is not surprising to note that communication with employers was considered the area of most concern for rehabilitation counselors. Studies have indicated that employers may not be able to look past a person's disability to determine his/her competence and ability to perform a job. Rehabilitation counselors should be encouraged to establish rapport and trust with employers and supervisors and educate them (or increase their awareness) regarding the potential ability of a person who is blind or visually impaired. More specific comments regarding communication and other areas of best practices are included in Appendix C.

"Rehabilitation counselors should be encouraged to establish rapport and trust with employers and supervisors, and educate them...regarding the potential ability of a person who is blind or visually impaired."

One particular strategy for increasing awareness is to have employers accompany the rehabilitation counselor to other job settings where individuals who are blind or visually impaired are competitively employed. In addition to increasing the employer's awareness, the counselor should clearly communicate the roles of all individuals in the rehabilitation process and provide a realistic estimate of the costs of rehabilitation.

"...the counselor should clearly communicate the roles of all individuals in the rehabilitation process and provide a realistic estimate of the costs of rehabilitation."

Technology

The most frequently used interventions in the area of job site modification were environmental modifications for the purpose of accessibility and safety. Low vision devices were the next most common interventions. In fact, the top six strategies for job site modification involved access and non-access technology. In a number of instances related to environmental modifications interventions included enlarging the print on forms, color coding files, purchasing talking calculators, etc. These were relatively "low-tech" interventions, not necessarily related to technology. Additional interventions included computerizing job tasks, purchasing access software devices capable of producing Braille, purchasing CCTVs, etc. The predominance of these interventions is understandable because low vision or blindness is often the only reason a person may have trouble retaining a job.

"The most frequently used interventions in the area of job site modification were environmental modifications for the purposes of accessibility and safety."

The most frequently utilized retraining strategy was the use of equipment. Thus, the counselor should maintain close contacts with technology specialists, rehabilitation engineers, and vendors in order to identify appropriate technology and related resources necessary for training. In addition, rehabilitation counselors should consider ergonomics when planning "high-tech" interventions for consumers. Additional recommendations for rehabilitation counselors are contained in Table 6.

"...the counselor should maintain close contacts with technology specialists, rehabilitation engineers, and vendors in order to identify appropriate technology and related resources necessary for training."

Rehabilitation agency policies, regulations, and limited financial resources may cause a substantial delay in the procurement of recommended technologies. Many respondents in this project recommended that a "bank of loaner equipment" be made available in order to expedite

"Many respondents in this project recommended that a 'bank of loaner equipment' be made available in order to expedite service provision."

service provision. This would allow consumers the opportunity to try-out equipment in the job setting before it is ordered. Furthermore, problems which require outside intervention may be remedied early in the process (e.g., absenteeism, lowered productivity).

Rehabilitation counselors should make use of all the experts available to them. If adequate resources are not available within the agency, specialists who are available as consultants may be utilized.

Networking

A number of counselors recommended that rehabilitation agencies become more proactive in publicizing their services and potential roles to employers and the community. As indicated in the Introduction to this report, employers are interested in obtaining assistance from rehabilitation agencies for the purpose of retaining workers who are disabled. Most often, this is highly cost-effective because a seasoned worker has already demonstrated that he/she can perform the job. However, many employers are not aware of the role rehabilitation agencies can play in the job retention process and/or may have some difficulty accepting agency representatives as impartial participants in the process. An employer's primary concern is productivity and a rehabilitation agency's primary concern (in this case) is to help individuals who are disabled retain their jobs. These two goals need not be at odds and may often be complementary. Furthermore, as employers and rehabilitation agencies form ongoing partnerships, the need to establish rapport and educate employers on a case-by-case basis will be minimized.

"...employers are interested in obtaining assistance from rehabilitation agencies for the purpose of retaining workers who are disabled....many employers are not aware of the role rehabilitation agencies can play in the job retention process."

"...as employers and rehabilitation agencies form ongoing partnerships, the need to establish rapport and educate employers on a case-by-case basis will be minimized."

In addition to forming rehabilitation-business partnerships, rehabilitation agency representatives can benefit from "networking" with a variety of service providers involved with consumers who are blind. Such providers include community colleges, product vendors, skills training centers,

universities, schools, and technology marketers. If the rehabilitation counselor's role is perceived primarily as that of a problem-solver (Chubon, 1992) and networks are pre-existing, then identification and utilization of these resources would automatically be facilitated.

Assessment

The category of Assessment, though not a ***direct*** strategy for achieving job retention, is a necessary condition for any intervention. Assessment should take place at numerous levels, particularly the following:

1. **Employers**. The rehabilitation counselor should carefully assess the problem situation that involves the employer and the employee. Outcomes of rehabilitation are closely related to the commitment of the employer to retain the rehabilitation consumer as an employee.
2. **Consumers**. It is preferable that the counselor also conduct a site visit to observe the consumer while he/she is working and to identify obstacles and natural supports. The rehabilitation counselor should also assess the person's motivation to continue employment, his/her self-perceptions, and expectations for the future. In some cases, the rehabilitation counselor should plan a complete low vision evaluation of the consumer.
3. **Job and Job Site**. The rehabilitation counselor should obtain a copy of the job description, analyze the job's primary components, and then assess the extent to which the client's abilities fit with job requirements.

Timeliness

Although job retention may not appear urgent at the time of initial referral, considerable time may have elapsed between the onset of a problem and the request for intervention. Between the time of problem identification and referral, a problem may have spawned into negative feelings and perceptions which complicate the situation. Failure to respond in a timely manner may further exacerbate the problem. Some rehabilitation agencies may serve consumers on the basis of a "severity of disability" criterion. Unfortunately, under such circumstances, job retention cases may not receive the priority necessary to alleviate a negative outcome for the consumer and the employer. In many cases, emotional repercussions and financial losses could be avoided by a prompt response to a request for services.

"In many cases, emotional repercussions and financial losses could be avoided by a prompt response to a request for services."

Conclusion

Job site modification and retraining strategies focused primarily on access issues, adjustment to disability, and technology. The number of cases involving job restructuring was low and interaction between rehabilitation counselors and organized labor was minimal.

"...counselors involved in retention activities should (a) emphasize communication between team members..., (b) conduct a thorough assessment of the employee and the job situation, (c) facilitate networking among all parties, (d) seek to involve external expert consultation when necessary, (e) proceed in a timely fashion, (f) monitor services received by clients, and (g) employ creativity in determining intervention strategies."

Based on strategies suggested by rehabilitation counselors who participated in this study, counselors involved in retention activities should (a) emphasize communication between team members (particularly rehabilitation professionals, employers, consumers); (b) conduct a thorough assessment of the employee and the job situation; (c) facilitate networking among all parties; (d) seek to involve external expert consultation when necessary; (e) proceed in a timely fashion; (f) monitor services received by clients; and (g) employ creativity in determining intervention strategies. An overwhelming majority of participants mentioned quality communication with employers as an effective strategy, suggesting that it may be prudent for rehabilitation counselors to view employers as consumers also. Also, such an approach is congruent with the systems-based intervention model (Chubon, 1992) in which all principals and their interests are considered when planning rehabilitation services.

"...it may be prudent for rehabilitation counselors to view employers as consumers also."

As determined by this study, there are many important facets to the process of job retention. A thread woven throughout the process is communication. The process is enhanced by communication that is on-going, based on established relationships where trust is high and listening is empathic to the needs and desires of all parties involved. All parties to the process should be desirous of a "win/win" outcome (Covey, 1989). Additionally, this study asserts that the rehabilitation counselor and the employee need to be proactive and solution-focused.

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Appendix A: Sample Questionnaire

December 8, 1993

1~

Dear 2~:

You have been recommended by your state director for participation in research on practices which enhance retention of competitive employment for individuals with visual impairments. We had contacted you previously to solicit your participation in this project. I would like to urge you to volunteer to participate in this project. As a rehabilitation professional, you impact the goal of job retention directly by offering expertise, education, and training to not only the client but the employer as well. The U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) has recognized the impact of appropriate intervention by requesting research in the area of job retention practices.

Through these grant monies, we are attempting to identify job retention practices through phone interviews with counselors and teachers, such as yourself, from across the United States. Approximately 150 rehabilitation professionals are being contacted nationwide.

If you chose to participate in the research, our contact with you will be in the form of one phone interview. The phone interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Throughout this process, your name will remain confidential to all except the individual completing the interview and at no time will your name be used in any reporting of the research.

If you wish to take part in this study, please return the form in the envelope that is provided to my attention, P.O. Drawer 6189, Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762 or call me at (601) 325-2001. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Also, in an effort to prepare you for the interview, I have enclosed a worksheet of the questions that will be addressed. Please feel free to discuss these questions with your peers and research any files that may be appropriate.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this research project.

Sincerely,

Anjoo Sikka, Ph.D.
Research Scientist I and
Project Director

Sample Questionnaire

The following information is designed to assist in answering questions during the phone interview.

Definitions

Competitive occupations are defined as those occupations which would be available to sighted as well as visually impaired individuals. This would exclude homemakers, vendors, sheltered workshop employees and other occupations of this general type.

Individuals are considered to have retained competitive employment if they are in a competitive occupation, become visually impaired, receive rehabilitation services and, remain in a competitive occupation.

Sample questions for the phone interview

You will be asked to discuss case scenarios where clients were able to retain competitive employment following rehabilitation intervention. Some of the key information that we are looking for would include:

1. Did the individual stay with the same company and in the same competitive occupation?

2. Was the role or scope of the individual's job changed?

3. What types of modifications were made to the environment to accommodate for the needs of the client and the employer?

4. Was there any intervention or interaction regarding this client with organized labor? If not, have you ever had the opportunity to work with organized labor in assisting a client in job retention?

5. What was actually done to keep the individual in his/her occupation?

You will also be given the opportunity to give your own ideas of how job retention could be enhanced through rehabilitation services.

As a final question, you will be asked to recommend one client that has retained competitive employment and would be willing to participate in the final phase of this research project. If you have a recommendation, it will be noted and placed into a pool of potential participants. The final client participant list will then be selected on a random basis. It is expected that an in-depth case study to include the counselor, client, significant others, and the employer will be conducted on only about 15 - 20 clients nationwide. Even if you cannot recommend a client, we would still like to include you in the study.

Consent to Participate

I wish to participate in research on competitive job retention.

Name: _____

Area Code & Telephone number: _____
Best time to call during May, 1995 (Please specify two appointment times):

1) _____

2) _____

Please return to:

Anjoo Sikka, Ph.D.
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
on Blindness and Low Vision
P.O. Drawer 6189
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Survey Form

PRIORITY 4: RETENTION

Interview Protocol
(Rehabilitation Counselor)

Name: _____ Date:_____

Interviewer: _____ Start Time:_____

Hello, this is _____ from the RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. We had contacted you earlier regarding your willingness to be interviewed as part of a research project on job retention. We appreciate your willingness to participate in this project. Is this still a good time for you to discuss this with us? (if yes, continue, if no, make another appointment)

********** **********

I will be asking you some questions about clients who have participated in rehabilitation for the purpose of retaining a competitive job. Do I need to clarify any element of the definitions for competitive occupations or retention which were previously sent to you?

Initially, please let me tell you that you are not required to answer any or all of the questions and may end the interview whenever desired.

I would also like to let you know the general sequence of questions I will be asking so you will understand the direction of the conversation. First, I will be wanting you to focus on one to three individual cases where you assisted a client in retaining competitive employment. The areas we will initially address include job restructuring, retraining, job-site modifications, and work with organized labor. I will be asking you specific questions about each of these areas. Then, you will be asked to give additional information in the form of general practice ideas to enhance job retention.

********** **********

Now, if you could, please focus on one case at a time which involved rehabilitation for the purpose of competitive job retention.

1. How was the job-site modified?

2. How was the job restructured to meet the individual needs of the client?

3. How was the individual retrained for the occupation?

4. How was organized labor involved in the rehabilitation process for this particular client?

5. To your knowledge, did the individual retain the same job title following rehabilitation?

____Yes ____No

6. To your knowledge, in comparing the individual's salary before and after rehabilitation, was it:

Higher Lower Same

7. Do you have any additional information to offer which might be of assistance in identifying practices which are effective in enhancing job retention?

Stop time of interview:_____

Appendix C: Participant Comments

Communication

1. Increase awareness among employers

General

- Educate Employers (2)
- Educating an employer (3)
- Educate the employers as to the possibilities and "sell them on the idea".
- [The] key [was] employer education
- Education for employers in adaptive technology and general awareness.
- Do inservice for job site individuals (employers).

Rehabilitation Process

- Education-let employers know about Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Employers and people with disabilities need to be aware of the rehabilitation agencies.

- Try to make aware/educate the employer about availability of services.
- [Make] employers aware of the rehabilitation process. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor cannot "fix" the clients, just modify the job so that the client can do it. Make them aware that the consumer is still the same person.
- Let the employer know about the availability of training opportunities [including] sharing costs.

Blindness

- Need to educate the employer more about the individuals with blindness and related technology.
- Convince employers that the [people who are] visually impaired can be reasonably competitive.
- Convince employer that a person with visual impairments can be successful at doing the job given the right equipment.
- Mentoring. Show them that other blind people do the job.
- (Let employer know about) Close Circuit Television, other low vision [devices]
- Talk to the employers, let them know that there are other people who are blind or visually impaired. Say local chamber of commerce is a good resource.
- Let them know employer will be able to work like they always have, just need to make some adjustments.
- When you look at [a] job, never assume that employers know what they are doing. Employers may seem to understand the disability, but the details of what is needed may not be at all similar to [their] past experiences.
- Try to educate the employer about what the blind person can do. Give specific

information about equipment.

- Need to make employers aware of what visually impaired people can do.
- Identify jobs that can be done without sight, especially given the [existing] technology.
- Make them aware of [the nature] of vision loss
- Help employers overcome some of the prejudice against the blind individual.
- Need to work closely with employers. Communication and employer education/awareness.
- Have an employer of a disabled client speak to other potential employers
- Let them observe them (people who are blind) working in other settings.
- If they see first hand [what the person who is blind can do], they understand better.
- (The Rehabilitation Counselor has vision impairment too). Employers benefit from seeing other professional who are visually impaired too.
- Employers are afraid of blind people. We have to try to convince them to do things.
- Getting supervisors, human resource specialists acquainted with what blind clients who work in competitive settings can do is very helpful.
- Make them aware of what accommodation involves. ([It is] more than just moving furniture around).
- Consulting with, and training the employer to accommodate is important.

2. Establish rapport with the employer

- Counselor needs to be non-threatening and make options available.
- Keep communication open.
- employer/counselor communication.
- good, honest/open communication.
- communication with employers.
- be honest up front with employer.
- Good/open communication with employer (2)
- Be sure you can work with the employer in order to access the materials, paperwork, etc.
- Interact with employer.
- Work with employer upfront.
- Being able to communicate well with the employer. You just do what you say you will, and maintain trust and credibility.
- The better your relationships with the employer from the outset, the better your chances to stay.
- In trying to work with employers, listen to them. [One] should have no preconceived notions when talking to employers. Establish good rapport.
- Work closely with first time supervisor creating an environment of cooperation.
- Employer needs to be approached in a very non-threatening manner. Rehabilitation Counselor is there to help and not the policy agent.
- When working with employers, be open. Express willingness to help the client and

employer. Be available for follow-up. Employer should be able to call you in case of a problem.

- Try to be helpful [to] the employer. Help them get their money's worth.
- Good communication with employer and employee
- Let them know that you are available to help and serve as resource and win the confidence/trust of the employers.
- Act as consultant to employers - they can't know what to do but they want to do the right thing.
- Make yourself available to the employer. They are usually quite eager to assist the client.
- Being available if there is a problem. Show employer you are there [for them]. Involve [the] employer.
- Cooperation of employer is [a] key [factor].
- Enlist cooperation of the employer. [We] need to make them aware of their role [and] reduce anxiety. Communicate that you are trying to increase the client's performance.
- Being able to pay for equipment is very helpful. Good public relations with employers.

3. Assess the employer's commitment to retaining the person who is blind.

- Employer [should be] very cooperative.
- Employer cooperation is helpful.
- Good support from employer.
- [When] workman's compensation and insurance is provided through employers.
- The key is how willing the employer is to cooperate and allow time for training and adjustment of the client.
- Sometimes in larger companies, the bureaucracy gets in the way. [It is] easier to work with small compan[ies].
- Employer['s] good attitude and interest in employee.
- Commitment of and interaction with employer.
- Attitude was biggest challenge
- Willing employer, [who] listens to options, tr[ies] new things.
- Find out what the person's relationship is with employers. Is the employer committed to helping retaining the person? Always be sure that the employer is cooperative.
- Need to understand [what] the employer expects from the client as far as job responsibilities. The employer's major commitment is "making money".

4. Work collaboratively with employers and convey realistic expectations.

- Be honest; let them know you cannot work miracles.
- Let the employer know that job modification is not [as] expensive as they think.
- Work with employer to get services and technology (specialized, e.g., locating a special monitor)
- Be an informed person. Lay cards on the table.
- Discuss all issues with top management. Explain (to the manager) why the

rehabilitation counselor is there.

- Sit down with the employer, give them time frames, expectations for productivity.
- More involvement with the employer, share information (collaborative effort is important).
- Work out agreeable solutions with the employee
- Rehabilitation counselor should make a direct contact with employer, to see what charges/purchases they can afford.
- Employer is as much a client as the individual with disabilities. Need to make the employer involved in the rehabilitation process.
- Write up very early in planning who needs to pay for what equipment.
- Be really clear [about] who is going to do what. Outline roles of employers under Americans with Disabilities Act and what are the roles of rehabilitation counselors.

5. Facilitate open communication between all individuals/agencies.

- Clients (at times) do not communicate with their employers that they have vision impairment; then, they change jobs. need to encourage clients to talk to their employers.
- Convince consumer to give permission to talk to employers.
- Don't always believe it when consumers say that employers do not want to accommodate them. Employers are very willing to help the person retain their jobs.
- If a client is reticent about speaking to employer, the counselor should negotiate.
- Educate clients that it is OK for employers to know that they are having problems due to vision loss.
- We emphasize on-site visits, employer contacts, we aggressively do job placement and education of employers.
- Make sure that you talk to other people in his (client's) previous jobs, to get a "good handle" on [as assessment of] their work performance (to verify what the client says).
- [We] have to communicate with all parties involved. Team approach.
- I ask for their opinion (client & employer) first as to what they think would work and they often have great ideas. Then, they feel a part of this and help more enthusiastically.
- Develop a Team Approach to a job.
- It takes a team approach.
- Sitting down with client and employer and getting [an] idea of what job duties are absolutely essential.
- Keep an open mind. Listen to [the] client about what they want, skills they have. Convey these to other agency you are working with.
- Take the time to talk to the client and employer.
- Become a partner with [the] client and [the] company.
- Close communication between employer, client, and counselor. To understand the situation and brainstorm options.
- Explain and engage people in the process of rehabilitation. Not a band-aid.
- keeping the client informed about what is going on with the employer [is important].
- meet with Equal Employment Opportunity specialist, client, Low Vision Specialist,

Counselor, and supervisor. [In this case] supervisor agreed to accommodate and purchase equipment needed.

- Contact the consumer and then the employer one-on-one. Outline the plan-go slow and educate.
- Good to meet with employer, client and the counselor.
- Effective communication between employer, employee, and our agency.
- Good to have a cooperative agreement with the unions and management

6. Maintain communication through the rehabilitation process.

- Stay abreast of the employers' concerns before planning any interventions.
- Lots of communication, keep in touch with team members.

Evaluation/Assessment

7. Assess the client's vocational skills, motivation, and low vision.

Vocational Background and Skills

- Get a good vocational evaluation first to find out what clients have done in the past.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor should start interactions with client about work and conduct testing: aptitude tests, vocational evaluation.
- Evaluating and setting up technology for the client.
- Meet with the client and [ask them to] tell (the rehabilitation counselor) what they want, what their job is like, job tasks [are like], etc.
- Assess the client's ability to deal with accommodations. If they are going through a trauma, they may not adapt to change very well. If they look at change objectively, they will be receptive of changes.
- More and varied work experience at a younger age seems important (not just a summer job with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, etc.)
- The client must also be able to do their work as well [as] if not better, than peers.
- Be sure that the person does not use vision disability as an excuse for incompetence.

Vision Status

- We send all clients with usable vision for Low Vision examinations.
- Need to evaluate functional aspect of blindness in the context of the job responsibilities.
- Good evaluation of visual status.
- Anyone who has low vision (usable) [should be] sent for a low vision evaluation, so that they can benefit from any minor changes (e.g., lighting). It is also good to have an on-site low vision evaluation.

- Good Low Vision evaluation.
- [There is a] big psychological difference between a sighted person with poor vision [and] a blind person with some vision. The latter can be in an equal playing field if they use the correct tools.
- Rehabilitation takes a lot longer when [the client is] totally blind.

Motivation to Work

- Identify thhe needs.
- [If client has] Strong motivation to learn, supervision [will be] very supportive.
- motivated client
- good employee, motivated to work.
- [If] client [is] well motivated, and good attitude.
- Willing and interest[ed] consumer.
- [A] client who is serious about continuing employment
- Biggest obstacle is when client does not believe that he/she can do the job.
- Fear of the unknown/unfamiliar [is an obstacle]
- Client's willingness to adapt and receive special training.
- Clients have to have the interest and desire to "stick" with the job.
- Make sure that the people [clients] have the skills, and they enjoy the job. Chances of retention are higher in [such] case[s].
- Change client outlook to [be] very positive. Job satisfaction is the key to job retention.
- Get them to take [the necessary] steps. Rehabilitation Counselor almost has to bully the client into seeking jobs, [and] retraining.
- Have the client go through a list of things they can offer. [The client] decides (to some extent) what they want.

Level of Self Advocacy

- Client himself did personal research and was knowledgeable about disability, resources, and options available.
- Client attitude, intelligence, and realistic view of self
- If the individual (client) is not accepted, [it does] no[t] matter how good, they aren't accepted.
- Client self-advocacy skills
- Element of empowerment. Employee should feel that they can trust the agency and they are guiding the whole process.
- Clients need to understand the intent and content of ADA
- Legal rights and responsibility awareness for person (ADA).
- Individual needs to accept the responsibility for using vision and be proactive. Teach client responsibility.

Orientation & Mobility

- Transportation and Vocational Skills is an issue.
- Transportation is a big issue
- Transportation solutions are ultimately a problem. [The Rehabilitation Counselor should] place people where they can find transportation. This is one of the greatest factors in job retention.
- Basic skills must be good such as Orientation & Mobility (If you can't get there; you can't work there).

General

- marketable skills among clients.
- Have your client interview with placement vendor and have them assess the client's skills.
- Find out what the skill level is. Get a good evaluation.
- Make sure the person has the personal basic skills.

8. Evaluate the job-site

- Site visits, one-on-one contact with supervisors involved.
- Education is important. Learn about company, work environment on the job (no armchair recommendation).
- More observation of job site by vocational rehabilitation counselor him/herself allows for better and accurate assessment of specific job site modification needs.
- Going to the job site makes a big difference. You [should] serve as a supportive consultant.
- Go to job site with clients
- Counselor spend the day with the client to finally decide what was needed when initial Low Vision Aids were not working out.
- Job site evaluation
- Have an independent job-site evaluator come in and look at jobs. Then, decide what is needed and who will purchase what [equipment].
- Getting a good, professional job site evaluation [by a person who has] some background in visual impairment.
- Figure out if it is a salvageable situation or not. If not, work with client to seek other solution[s].
- Service should be site specific.
- "Natural supports". Look for assistance that is already at the workplace in terms of advice, mentoring from co-workers, supervisor.

9. Conduct a job analysis.

- Thorough job analysis (on-site).
- Do a really good job analysis.
- Thorough job analysis. Get copy of job description.
- Talking to the client, supervisors, co-workers at the worksite. Look at all the tasks that the client has to do, how much the client [is] willing to retain his job. Speed/productivity is an issue.
- Good task analysis of [the] job helps in doing what needs to be modified.
- Thorough and complete job analysis. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors [are] not really trained for job analysis. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors should be trained in this area.
- Conduct job analysis (extensive) to help them recognize problems. Visit site.
- Specific task analysis.
- Make sure you have a comprehensive analysis of what exactly their job duties are.
- Pretend [the] client is not blind. Look at what [the] job entails. Then, [determine] how do you get around it.

10. Determine if there exists a good "match" between the job and client's abilities.

- Should look for a good "fit".
- Rehabilitation Counselor may get so involved in the status "26" that they [may] not place [the client] realistically or get a good match between skills and job.
- Making sure they are in the right job [ensures] better retention.

11. Do not ignore the importance of the evaluation/assessment stage.

- The diagnostic stage is very important. [It] should be done well.
- good preliminary evaluation

Rehabilitation Agency Policies

12. Research agency policies for the flexibility allowed.

- Agencies need to become more flexible [based] less [on client] need and less time lag in purchasing equipment for clients.
- Vocational Rehabilitation agenc[ies] at times place limitations on the extent to which services [are] provided. At time, [due to policies] it is not possible to give latest technology [for the client] to perform more efficiently and look better. For example, [for] lawyers, [it is] very important to look professional, and act/look efficient.

13. Try to develop a bank of loaner equipment available to clients.

- Suggest agencies purchase a "bank" of equipment and adaptive devices to help clients become immediately placed. Once [adaptive device is] successful, purchase equipment by looking

at Local Area Network List on statewide computer list.

- Have a loaner bank of equipment to expedite the process.
- Loaner equipment is important. Employers are looking for an instant answer/solution (at times equipment takes 5 to 6 months to order/receive. [In the meantime] employee may lose [his/her] job).
- Loaner equipment helps employers know what they need to buy.
- Loaner library of adaptive equipment is very helpful till equipment is ordered. [Client can] lose a job in that amount of time. [Have] agreements [in place] with vendors to loan software.
- Loaner programs.
- Initial investment-If we can purchase equipment that is needed (instead of the employer) we can really help retention. Right now [there is] a $30,000 limit for eligibility.

14. Conduct outreach/education programs for rehabilitation district.

- Market what rehabilitation counselors do (rehabilitation agencies). Sort of like community outreach.
- Make people aware/educate them about blindness.
- More publicity about the employers responsibility under the Rehabilitation Act.
- Outreach programs for education would really help. Maybe [we should] go through the Chamber of Commerce. Do more public speaking. They are just afraid. [Conduct] job development for employers so you can put an employee in when the time is right.
- Often [we] won't get a referral until they have left the job (timeliness). If they were still in the job, you could be more helpful with assisting them. Physicians should not wait until after the fact to refer.
- Education for the general public, employer about the way a disabled person can be competitive in jobs.
- The hardest thing is to convince an employer who is hesitant to work with [the] disabled. We are thinking about develop an information booklet. It would be nice to have a placement organization to negotiate with employers (not just placement counselors). We have developed a placement consortium but multidisabled [clients] continue to be difficult to place.
- Reaching out to businesses and offering expertise without interactions being class based.
- Make employers know that we exist and [about] the services we provide.
- Make people aware of the tremendous technology available to people who are visually impaired (clients and employers).
- I personally feel that there are so many people with higher incomes who never get referred on to Vocational Rehabilitation. So, I would like to meet with local ophthalmologists to encourage them to refer them to us. They need to know what we can do to keep people employed and off Social Security.
- Public awareness is low (in his area).
- There is still a void of knowledge about Blindness/Visual Impairment. We try to get our clients to educate their peers and the public.
- The hardest thing for employers is that they don't really understand [the nature of]

disabilities. Its a shame we don't have a full blown education program.

- Select, by state, "Disabled Employer of the Year"

15. Know your agency policies and state laws, and keep abreast of innovative programs.

- [Name of state] has a state law that is stronger than ADA and agency tries to get employer to provide most of the equipment.
- We are starting to use computer equipment with college students so they are just ready and we don't have to re-educate them.
- Rehabilitation counselor districts need to be smaller so that Office of Rehabilitation can communicate with employer to do training and increase awareness. - Administration fails to recognize the value of job retention in comparison to initial job placement of client.
- Adequate training [should be provided to the clients] so that they can be competitive with sighted people. We also need more educational offerings for low functioning individuals. We don't have much [of these opportunities] for those [individuals] who function higher than [the level of] sheltered workshop, but not quite at the level of competitive.

16. Monitor your attitudes towards job retention and individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

- Believe in employment retention
- Vocational rehabilitation counselor should not be afraid of placement and working with employers.
- Be open and receptive and keep in mind client's needs.
- Be willing to let the client control his life and rehabilitation process.
- Rehabilitation Counselor should be very tactful regarding productivity. Rehabilitation Counselor should be aware of resources (people doing job analysis) and technology.
- [I] feel that it is very important that a person not get in a situation where the person takes a reduction in wages.
- [It is not good that] we settle for less than we can monetarily and don't make it worth their time to work and get off benefits.

Intervention Process

17. Respond to request for intervention in a timely manner.

- Get as much information as possible and start services quickly (if people resign [it is a] great loss).
- If they are working, [they should] talk to the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor before things get out of hand; the earlier the better.
- Meet the needs of the employers/clients immediately and not go by the "order of selection" criteria (e.g., most severe handicap)

- If it is a present[ly working] worker, get an evaluation immediately to get a feel of what the interventions will be like, [i.e.] high tech. or low tech.
- Get involved as early as possible to counsel with client.
- Early identification of problems. As soon as the client/employer feels that there is a problem, contact the Rehabilitation Counselor immediately.
- being able to get equipment to clients quickly. Have loaner equipment for the client during the interim period. This is very important.
- ability to respond quickly in a job retention case. Employers and employees do not have a lot of time to wait around.
- Respond in a timely manner
- Get services started as soon as possible.
- Get to the employer and client as soon as possible to enhance job retention.
- Reaction time. Need to respond quickly to request for intervention/equipment.
- High tech evaluations should be done quicker.
- Find out before it is a lost cause. Timely response to avoid any problems with employers or clients, before problems snowball.
- Early intervention
- Early intervention is key. Timely referrals important.
- Speed in contacting the employer is important.

18. When conducting evaluations or recommending interventions, use expert help.

- In placing a person who is severely visually impaired, it is not a one-man operation. Team work and dedication on the part of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor [is important].
- Use all expertise available to you, use experts. Don't assume you know everything (e.g., computer programming, Orientation & Mobility, computer hardware and software).
- [When] technical support personnel provide site evaluation and make recommendation, bring in equipment and try it out and work with on-site technicians.
- Engineering services often help us get our foot in the door as far as recommendations.
- Ask rehabilitation technologist to access/verify what the rehabilitation counselor recommends.
- Need a sensory aids specialist (as opposed to relying on the vendor)
- Itinerant teachers [can] make presentations when rehabilitation counselor cannot go out.
- Adaptive aids specialists are very helpful [because] types of equipment change so quickly. [We] need a specialist.
- Can involve career development specialist, technology experts.
- [Getting a] knowledgeable computer programmer to assist and interfacing of equipment to employment setting computer is helpful.
- [Bring] Technology Specialist to the work right away (we are not mandated to have a technology specialist)
- Insure there are qualified trainers to teach application of technology.
- Technology has traditionally been difficult and time-consuming to order. [We] need

knowledgeable people in technology with the ability to bypass the competitive bid process.

- having the availability of technical/specialized staff is very useful (e.g., low vision specialist who can make a site visit and save jobs).
- [The] convenience of having our own technical engineer in our office if great. [Ensures] good response time. he does the assessment, prescription, receives equipment, and sets it up.
- Availability of an evaluator (rehabilitation engineer, assistive technology) is very helpful. It still is very slow.
- Low Vision services [are] very helpful.
- Use specialist[s] [for] mobility, career development, low vision.
- Placement and job specialists (effective) are a big help.
- Work closely with rehabilitation teacher to help organize work.
- Augment [your] skills by involving a job developer [in the process]
- Using job coaches to do training is helpful. Case loads are high [and we] do not have much time to do individual job development so we use [the] job coach to help with job training.
- Availability of facility training (e.g., Orientation & Mobility at work) is very helpful.
- Make sure people evaluating Low Vision needs are qualified. For instance in [some] Low Vision centers, some interns may not be as satisfactory.
- See what options there are through agencies for the blind to meet with vendors and research equipment on their {client's] own.

19. Pay attention to technology and ergonomics in job-site modification.

- [It is] important to adapt site to individual needs
- Match equipment with each other and with clients needs (note: this comment has been extremely paraphrased)
- Little things are real important, e.g., [if the person is] bringing in the work closer [to them], [then] the chair is not [situated] right (ergonomics). Look at basics before looking at high tech things.
- Availability of access technology
- [I] believe that sensory aid devices have created opportunities for clients that did not exist [earlier].
- Technology has really opened doors for clients
- [There is a] program for vocational evaluation and Life Skills. [The] computer helps [provide] a comprehensive evaluation of a person's skills/strengths.
- When selecting technology, [try] low tech first [and] high tech later.

20. In re-training for job retention, include instruction in the use of technology and personal counseling.

Training in Technology

- Educate client in use of equipment.

- Get them to use the equipment.
- Adaptive Equipment. Training clients in the use of Adaptive Equipment [is] very important.
- Frequently use technology to assist individuals, [for example] CCTV's, spectacle lens, [and other] Low Vision Aids.
- A lot of jobs can be retained with [appropriate] electronic equipment.
- Increase awareness in technology

Personal/Adjustment Counseling

- Adjustment Counseling.
- When somebody loses their vision, they are only concerned with rushing back to work. We should establish enough trust so as to encourage participation in services such as personal adjustment to blindness. If these things are not dealt with now, they can hinder them later in relation to retention.
- Recommend that clients work with counselors outside the agency for work adjustment issues, self-confidence [issues].
- Pay attention to counseling issues; people are concerned that their futures are limited because of vision loss.
- [Provide] on-the-job training where salary is often supported while the individual is trained.

21. The job may need to be restructured during the rehabilitation process.

- Recommend half-time rehabilitation (not full-time) so that they can continue to transfer what they learn in rehabilitation to work [and] motivation and self-confidence remain strong. [I] believe that full-time rehabilitation is detrimental to successful retention.

22. Provide training and workshops for co-workers and other staff at the job-site.

- Inservices with staff and employers about their questions about dealing with (interacting with) people who are blind.
- Education and sensitivity training for co-workers in dealing with a person who transition[s] back into her job.
- Co-workers should also be made aware that they do not have to take over what "Mary" does. But just restructure job to help Mary do what she does best.
- Co-workers/supervisors/Human Resource persons [should be] provided sensitivity training.

23. Maintain contact with employer and clients. Conduct routine follow-up.

- Make sure that once you place a person, [you] do not abandon him. have contact with employers and clients.

- Keep equipment updated so that their [consumers and employers] needs are still met.
- [It is] crucial to the process [to] identify appropriate accommodations and follow-up to be sure they work for specific situation.
- Follow-up training.
- Make sure there is substantial follow-up.
- Follow-up consistently after placement.
- Follow-up procedure should be formally implemented (routine follow-up, with the assistance of management services to "touch base" with client to see how they are doing).

Other Comments

Job Retention

- Wish we would also look at job placement (initial) vs. job retention.
- Job retention is highly correlated with the kind of job preparation they have received (e.g., job seeking skills, etiquette)
- Job retention must be looked at more globally. [We] must have a good job market to begin with.
- When a client comes to Vocational Rehabilitation services and already has a job, [there is] a higher rate of success (specially if no one else knows about it).

Funds

- job training funds.
- TJTC provides employees a tax break during the first year (e.g., If employee earns $10,000, the employers gets back $5,000)

Individualizing the process

- Individualize the process
- Flexibility and individual/personal emphasis.

General

- Its a win-win situation for Vocational Rehabilitation and Labor Union.
- The fact that the client was working in a government office was positive politically.
- Streamlining evaluations would save time and money.

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